

## COUNSELLING AND ITS EFFECT ON PERCEIVED STRESS AMONG YOUNG ADULTS

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### ABSTRACT

*The aim of the study was, to find out the effect of counseling on perceived stress among young adults. The current article presents the mean differences of perceived stress among young adults before and after counseling. To conduct the study a sample of 120 young adults belonging to the age group of 20-40 years were selected. To measure the stress levels among young adults Perceived stress scale developed by Cohen (1983) was used. Highly significant mean differences were observed in perceived stress among young adults before and after counseling. Therefore, it was found that counseling techniques were effective in reducing stress and enhancing better coping strategies among young adults.*

**KEYWORDS:** Stress Scale, Counselling & Young Adults

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### INTRODUCTION

Young adults undergo a major transition from being adolescent to adulthood. These transitions are associated with instability and major adjustments in life. Young adults trying to develop new skills or to learn to cope with new experiences in their daily life. A successful transition will enhance the young adult's willingness to take up new challenges and accept changes in life. Inability or unsuccessful transition often leads to stress among young adults limiting their performance at work and also with family. Sources of stress are different for everyone it might be because of the competitive world where they are under constant scrutiny to accomplish higher education, unpredictable professional environment, heavy compensations with huge expectations for employees, etc. Moreover, young adults also encounter with new roles and responsibilities in personal life as being a partner, a parent and financial management will often lead to stress among young adults. Stress and anxiety are common psychiatric conditions that affect many people. These psychiatric conditions are so common that 31% of the United States population experience an anxiety disorder at some point in life (Bitsika & Sharpley, 2012).

Stress has direct effects on moods and increases sleep disturbances, irritability, and cognitive changes such as impaired concentration affecting both physical and mental health among young adults leading to anxiety, depression and dementia. A study conducted by Optum, (2016) with a sample size of 200,000 employees (over 30 large companies) revealed 46% of the workforce in organizations in India suffers from some or the other

form of stress. Forty three per cent with skewed BMI (body mass index), of which 30% with diabetes risk, 30% with hypertension risk due to stress. They also found that this number is about 30% higher than a survey conducted in 2014 with a sample size of 30,000. In order to address the perceived stress among young adults. In order to address perceived stress among young adults, it was identified that counseling would be an effective method in helping young adults manage their stress. Counseling is an intervention strategy that can facilitate young adults in reducing stress and anxiety, as well as improving their well-being. This is done through skills fostered by the counselor, such as being present in the moment with clients, participation in active listening, fostering a strong therapeutic relationship, and reflecting empathy for the client feelings, all in a non-judgmental way (Kaplan, Tarvydas, & Gladding, 2014). Stress management and relaxation techniques help individuals to cope up with their life situations and enhance their well-being. Therefore, the current study aimed to understand the perceived stress among young adults before and after counselling in order to see the effectiveness of counselling.

## METHODOLOGY

### Sampling Procedure

#### Sampling Criteria

Young adults belonging to the age group of 20-40 years were selected for the study.

#### Technique for Sample Selection

Purposive sampling technique was adopted for the study (young adults who had approached counselling centers in order to seek help from professionals for their perceived stress were part of the study)

#### Size of the Sample

An equal sample of 60 men and 60 women were selected for the study.

## MEASUREMENT TOOLS

### Perceived Stress Scale

To find out the perceived stress among young adults, the investigator used “perceived stress scale” developed by Sheldon Cohen (1983). The PSS internal consistency Cronbach's co-efficient (reliability) of the scale was 0.85. It assesses the degree to which participants evaluate their lives as being stressful during the past month.

### Procedure

The data on the perceived stress scale was collected in two stages one before counselling sessions and the other after counselling. The collected data were coded and analyzed using frequency, percentages and paired t-test.

## RESULTS

**Table 1: Perceived Stress of Young Adults before Counselling  
(N=120)**

S. No	Stress Category	Pre-Test	
		Frequency	Percentage
1.	Very low	0	0
2.	Low	17	14
3.	Moderate	34	28

Table 1: Contd.,			
4.	High	47	39
5.	Very high	22	18

The table 1 gives the details on perceived stress among young adults before counselling. It was observed that thirty nine percent of young adults perceived high stress compared to rest of the other categories, followed by twenty eight percent had perceived moderate levels of stress and very high stress was perceived by eighteen percent of the sample. Very few were found in the low stress category comprising of fourteen percent. None of the sample had scored very low on perceived stress before counselling. High levels of stress cause major physiological, psychological and behavioral dysfunctions. This might be because of an innate need to stand on their own feet and prove themselves and their capabilities to the world might have led to constant pressures on the young adults. Any hurdle in their path, leads to varied psychological problems like stress, depression, and anger.

There are several emotional problems that young adults face. This has mostly got to do with their age and with the change in their hormones and the external environment. The findings are in line with a study conducted by Moskowitz, Stein, & Lightfoot, (2013) revealed that younger adults, ages 18 to 33, experience the highest average levels of stress and report the lowest capacity to effectively cope with that stress of any participating age group. This age group is uniquely disadvantaged with respect to stress, and they have the highest potential for stress-related illness as they transition to independent adulthood, establish themselves in a career, and launch a family during a period of rapid social change. Researchers have demonstrated that the pressures associated with a constantly-shifting social milieu strike hardest at the segment of society, most invested in attaining workforce and family stability (Coreil, Bryant, & Henderson, 2001; Krieger, 2001)

**Table 2: Perceived Stress of Young Adults after Counselling**  
(N=120)

S. No	Category	Post-Test	
		Frequency	Percentage
1.	Very low	29	24
2.	Low	31	26
3.	Moderate	38	32
4.	High	13	11
5.	Very high	9	8

From the table 3 it can be observed that thirty two percent of the sample was in the moderate category of perceived stress followed by twenty six percent in low and twenty four percent in the very low category for the same after counselling. Very few were found in high and very high perceived stress categories compared to pre-test. This can be inferred that fifty percent of the sample had perceived low and very low stress in the post counselling sessions. This might be because the counselling had supported them on things they find difficult and enabled them to develop personal coping strategies which reduced their stress levels in the post test. The findings in the qualitative portion of this study was the importance of participants learning coping strategies to help manage and deal with stress and anxiety. A study which revealed that when a client and a counselor, establish a trusting and effective relationship, the counselor can then introduce specific coping skills and relaxation techniques that may assist an individual in not taking away the stress or anxiety but being able to better manage the severity of the stress and anxiety they experience.

Such learned coping skills could be utilized not only in the counselling session but also in day-to-day life activities that may cause individuals stress or anxiety (Geller & Porges, 2014).

**Table 3: Mean Differences in Perceived Stress among Young Adults before and after Counselling**

Perceived Stress					
PRE-Test		Post-Test		t-Value	p-Value
Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
16.5	4.5	11.5	4.4	13.9**	0.000

**Note:** \*Significance at ( $P < 0.05$ ), \*\*Significance at ( $P < 0.05$ ), NS- Not Significant

It was evident from the above table 3 that mean scores of young adults with respect to before and after counselling on perceived stress had revealed highly significant differences. It was remarkable to note that counselling had an impending and profound effect on perceived stress of young adults which resulted in lowering the stress levels after counselling.



**Figure 1: Mean differences in Perceived Stress among Young Adults before and after Counselling**

Counselling facilitated the individuals in finding out the causative factors of stress. It also helped the individuals to rule out the best possible ways to cope from a stressful situation. This results were in congruence with a study conducted by Marques, Lopez & Pais-Ribeiro, (2011) that building of hope for the future was one of the most important aspect which helped participants reduce their stress levels. Three out of five participants noted that counselling has helped to change their patterns of thinking from a negative outlook to a positive outlook. This has found to be helpful in counselling for counselors and clients to set obtainable goals for the future. Working towards these goals and achieving them can be very empowering and uplifting for individuals who suffer from stress and anxiety. It is important for the counselor to help the client focus on the clients' strengths and building off of those for positive outcomes.

## CONCLUSIONS

The finding of the study reveals that stress management techniques, relaxation therapies and goal-oriented training had enhanced young adult to cope with stress. The mean differences clearly depicted that after counseling young adults had reduced perceived stress compared to before counseling. Young adults are accepting the problems and learned to better face the situation by planning and focus on their strengths through counseling. Hence, it can be concluded that counseling was one of the most effective ways in stress management.

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